



Turning Complaints into Solutions!

Objective: Provide your team with the skills necessary to approach problems and complaints in a constructive and productive way.

Content: This may be hard to believe but complaining can be a great tool for initiating change. The key is to learn how to complain constructively. If presented well and to the right people, complaints can lead to change and improvement without creating a toxic and negative environment. This Lunch & Learn is designed to provide your team with the tools necessary to avoid the biggest sucker of positive energy... complaining! Utilize this activity to teach your team how to turn a complaint or problem into a suggestion for improvement.

Prior to Lunch & Learn Session:

- In preparation for the group discussion, the leader should determine the top 5-10 complaints that are frequently heard in your business. Print each complaint out and place in a jar or can for the Lunch & Learn. *If you prefer, you can utilize some of the sample complaints provided below. Either way, we do encourage you to come up with a few of your own so that you can not only improve communication skills, but also work through a few existing challenges in your business.
- Take at least one complaint and reword it to be more solution focused (so that you have a sample prepared in the event your team struggles with the task). Again, you can utilize the samples provided as reference. The supporting documents will also provide guidance in crafting answers that are solution focused.

During Lunch & Learn Session:

- Read the “Content” summary above out loud to the team. Feel free to add your thoughts on why this topic is so important.
- Review the Tips on Constructive Complaining with the team.
- Pass around the jar of Common Complaints and have a team member choose one and read aloud. After each example is read, have a discussion about how each complaint can be re-worded to be more solution focused.
- Reinforce that this exercise was not intended to eliminate complaints. Everyone’s ideas, concerns and opinions are important and welcomed by the leadership team. Just be sure that all complaints are solution focus so that negative energy does not build.

*This is a skill that may need constant fostering. Encourage your leaders to continually remind team members to use this approach whenever there is a need to complain.

Supporting Education Articles/Tools: The information below provides additional guidance on the topic and should be reviewed prior to and during the meeting:

Tips on Constructive Complaining

Complaining for the purpose of resolving a concern or grievance can be helpful. You need to make sure complaints are solution focused. Complaining without potential solutions or the intention of positive outcome fuels further negativity and is off-putting to those you are complaining to. Utilize the tips below to ensure your complaints are solution focused:

1. Have a purpose. Think about an objective that you want to accomplish that is reasonable and specific to the topic you are complaining about.
2. Offer a reasonable solution to the problem immediately after presenting your concern.
3. Complain to the right person. Don't just spout off complaints to the person that happens to be standing next to you. Seek out people that can initiate change.
4. Avoid placing blame. Focus on moving forward and finding lasting solutions.
5. Choose the right time. Choose a moment where there's time and energy to deal with the issue.
6. Treat everyone with kindness. Be respectful to all parties involved.
7. Complain when there's a reason to but remember to appreciate the good stuff also – don't just always complain.

Examples of Common Complaints in a Pet Care Business

Complaint: "Sheila closed last night, and everything is a mess. The lobby floor was dirty, her coffee mug was still in the sink and it looks like she probably ate every cookie that Bandit's mom brought us yesterday!"

With solution presented: "Sheila closed last night, and a few things were overlooked. It was frustrating to spend the first 15 minutes of my day cleaning up from yesterday. Sheila may be in need of a little more guidance. What do you think of printing out the closing duties checklist, so she can actually carry her own copy at the end of the day and mark things off as she goes?"

Complaint: "I am so tired of Snowball. The only thing that dog does is bark all day and pee in his suite. He is so annoying, I don't know why we even let him come here."

With solution presented: "Snowball has been a real challenge lately with his incessant barking and peeing several times a day in his suite. The barking is really increasing the stress level of the dogs and staff that are around him. I think it may be helpful if we talk to his mom about contacting a trainer to work with him. It may help him feel more comfortable when he is here and hopefully improve his potty manners too."

Complaint: “Megan is constantly on her cell phone. She is always texting and looking at Facebook. Nobody ever says anything to her about it!”

With solution presented: “Megan has been spending quite a bit of time on her cell phone when we are with the dogs. I am concerned that an incident will occur because she is always distracted. Would you mind talking to her about this? I would appreciate it.”

Complaint: “Ugh, who is going to check-in Sundance today? Her mom drives me crazy. She just wants to chat and chat and chat about everything!”

With solution presented: “Sundance is checking in today. Last time her mom kept me in the office for 10 minutes chattering away about her vacation. This was aggravating because it got me behind on completing my confirmation calls. Today I was thinking that I will have Kerry page me from the back if she sees I am still struggling to end our conversation. This way I can excuse myself from the conversation easily. What do you think of this idea?”

Complaint: “I’m freezing in the play yard. I’m so sick of being stuck out here all morning on these cold days.”

With solution presented: “I’m freezing outside in the early morning hours. Do you think we could come up with a scheduled rotation so the outside staff gets a few breaks from the cold during extreme temperatures?”

Complaint: “The front desk keeps overbooking daycare! I would like to see one of them out here in the play yards trying to manage all these dogs. Maybe that would teach them a lesson.”

With solution presented: “We are routinely getting overbooked on Tuesdays and Thursdays for daycare, which is causing a lot of additional stress on the play yard team. Would it be possible for the front desk to encourage those without standing reservations on Tuesdays and Thursdays to book a different day?”

Other Tips Specific to your Center. The list above was designed to get you started. What are other common complaints in your center?